

Thank you for picking up this book. I have tried to bring this into fruition for a few years, but words have failed.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Joshua Richard Bolduc, who died on February 20th, 2008, and his mother and father (and my Aunt and Uncle), Carol Bolduc and Christopher Bolduc.

Though this book does go into detail about the killing, it is not intended as non-fiction and some aspects may not be correct. Also, it's public knowledge that Josh's half brother, Matthew Cushing, committed this act of terrible violence that continues to cast a long shadow over all of our lives.

This book is also dedicated to everyone who loved Josh, Carol, and Christopher.

i'm chasing luke through the skatepark,
holding a camcorder
i bought at goodwill for 8 dollars,
i'm shaking, my hands are sweating,
and it's hard to keep the footage stable.
brendan tries to hit a kickflip
but bails before he lands,
missing the concrete, rolling onto the grass.

as i run towards him,
he's lying on his back, rigid and silent,
pretending to be dead.

'dude, that was crazy,' i call
as i run towards him.
i stand over him, and
zoom the camcorder in on his face,
his eyes still closed.
he opens them at once,
and, howling with laughter,
raises his left leg,
pretending to kick me
in the balls.

except he accidentally
uses too much force,
and actually kicks me in the balls--
that ache you can feel everywhere--
in your stomach and teeth.

i collapse beside him,
clutching my groin,
moaning in pain
and howling with laughter,
tears rolling down my cheeks.

today is June 27th, 2007.
i'm 14 years old.
on february 20th, 2008,
at 5:02 p.m, i will die.

but on this early
summer morning,
in old orchard beach maine,
when the tourists
are pouring in from quebec
and filling up the beach
and buying fudge
and french fries
and punching seagulls,

i am in the infancy of my hopes and dreams.
i want to be a filmmaker.
the three of us--luke, jason--
want to start a show like Jackass.

the world is still a path, wide open.
the limits are unknowable.
every possibility is open.

after february 20th,
there will not be a tomorrow.
but today there is one
and it is full and bright.

maybe,

jason, luke and kyle
could come over in the morning
when my mom and dad are both at work
and i could film them doing something dope,
like jumping from the roof into the pool
or maybe luke
would finally nail a kickflip.

and maybe,

later in the afternoon,
as the orange,
hazy summer sun
sets low in the sky
and the seemingly
endless summer day
plods toward
an inevitable sunset
the three of us could walk
down to the beach,
weave in between the crowds
of tourists in speedos,
and watch those slow waves
roll lazily to the shore

backs lit up by the golden hour sun,
the dark creeps up
we'll realize we are late.
we'll race home before our
parents figure out where we were.

maybe,

after dinner,
jason, luke and kyle
could come over and play DND.

maybe,

afterwards, the four of us
could cannonball into the pool
deep into the twilight water,
the sticky hot humidity still permeating
through the early darkness.

and the chlorine would set
in my shaggy brown hair
and my dad
would come out, in his boxers,
screaming at us in his high,
nasally voice for being too loud,

and tell my friends to
“get the hell out of here”,
and for me
to get the hell inside.

and as i fell asleep,
no nightmares of death
no idea that even
those clear moments
time marched steadily towards the
murky pinpoint,
a date carved into the near future
where life diverged from me.
skin ripped open by a knife,

my own blood
spilled in the hallway
between my room and the bathroom.

and now, rolling face-down
in the grass in the skatepark,
no one knows the truth.
there is no prophecy,
except for the closed circle
of time.

i have no idea that death is so close,
lips of carrion
breathing down my neck.

and i'm glad
because if i knew
that summer afternoon
would have changed.

time would have slowed and
stopped and
the heat pounding

on all the tarred
asphalt and the dry pointy grass,

and even the cicadas in their summer song
would have sang some grim fortelling;

there would have been panic.

tonight, there is no panic.
just a 14 year old boy
with his friends,
in the summer,
living.

and i could never know that
my murder would be
so unfair, so horribly absolute,

violence fell upon me
the featherlike weight of
the blade slicing my body
slicing skin,
spilling blood.

and i guess it is better that i did not know
that the last moment was truly my last
until life finally drained from me.

time cursed me, but knowledge did not.
that afternoon, I lived fully, laughing, rolling
in the grass.

ignorant to the emptiness of a future
without me,
a future
dulled down
into
in a single sentence,

“i’m dead.”
-Josh

“Josh is dead.””

for a while, right after,
i had to remind myself
all the time. i'd wake up,
have a normal thought--

like 'winter vacation is about to end;'
or 'i need to finish my English project'
always tailed, stalked by
the nagging thought

'oh yeah. Josh is dead.'

i'm almost 30. You
died when i was 14.
and still,
this path doesn't seem real.
it seems like a trick of the mind,
a fabricated reality.

i still can't believe
there's no
room for you to make
mistakes,
no room to grow-up,
no place in this trajectory
for you to be anything at all.

and i know i'm almost 30, and i wish I could stop,

but
i walk this cursed place,
looking for you.

every bump at night,
every pattern noticed
is a sign of your presence.

i am not the one who is dead
but i commune with you as I write this,
as i type these words I ask

'where are you? do you need help?'

-Jonny

*“in a dream, i tell you that i am not at peace i am still a
slave to time i am still stuck
throwing myself at these closed doors
staring down all of these paths,
paths
decapitated
with my death and i am afraid to tread”*

-Josh

“and we stick to each other like a curse.
i itch with the memories of you alive, my soul gnaws at where you have
gone,
and i pound with terror when
i think about your death.
the terror has made a nest
in my stomach and a
vacation home in my brain.
it consumes me in ways
i cannot recognize.

i do not know how to help you.”

-Jonny

“jesus Christ,
dude, do anything.
live.”

-Josh

“your spirit is made alive with anger
at what you will never be,
and as i commune with you
i feel that anger,
that righteous hatred of violence,
that righteous thrashing against
the injustice of your death,

i take it and mold the itch
into a hunger and
craft the hunger
into an untouchable pain,
so deep that i could never reach it,

a bruise at the core of my being
that festers
and becomes infected,

a pain
of my own doing,
a pain i know well.

a pain i understand

a pain i take comfort in.”

-Jonny

“dude, i didn’t
die so i could watch
you resist life. you have
moments still where you can feel
the breeze of the sea against your face,
where you can eat a fried dough at
the boardwalk,
where you can have a job,
a child,
a wife,
a friend.

there’s a part of you that died with me, sure.

but this selfish grief is not for me;

it’s so you have an excuse to remain stagnant.

you are attached to this narrative
like a chain
wrapped around your leg.

and you keep

S
I
N
K
I
N
G

.”

-Josh

“we see each other. we
know what is not and never will be.
can we walk towards some peace?
can we move from the burning potential, the wasteland
of your death and move towards a future unbruised and full?

dead brother, will you walk with me into the fire and emerge cleansed?"

-Jonny

“it is a summer day.
i’m damp, and the chlorine
from the pool has set into my skin and hair, sticky.
i sit down in the grass,
grasp a small twig
and snap it absentmindedly.

i close my eyes.
the air is hot and heavy.
the skin at my hairline feels tight,
and tomorrow, i’ll have a sunburn.

i open my eyes.

endless blue. Cicada songs burst out.” -Jonny

“there is no fear in this moment.
you have done nothing wrong.” -Josh.

“still, i am being chased by some nagging terror.” -Jonny

“you could sleep inside of this moment.
you could live inside this string of seconds.
it would be fine. it would be good.
these moments have a place to
nestle and burrow.
i can help you survive.” -Josh

“i don’t listen. i open my eyes.
there is fear.
there is a great sorrow.
there is a catalog of sins
and a host of terrors eating at my soul.” -Jonny

“a grief counselor told me
that in the wild when elephants die
when the grief
lashes up against their huge bodies
they get close to each other,

as close as they can

and they swarm together
and they do not leave
each other alone

they pull close
they try to protect themselves from

the grief
and the predators
that feast on the
vulnerable

and i don't know why she told me that.
it did not make me feel any better.

the elephants were better at grief.

when josh died we were screaming
and we were numb
and we were caving in on ourselves
and if i were an elephant
my family would have huddled close up let
that grief wash over us,

shielding each other from the
storm breaking us apart,
protecting each other

from the communal crumbling
but we were humans
and we were screaming

at the empty gods inside of us draining out

and you should know
that in my sleep i am in the bedroom where josh died
and i am in the bedroom where josh died

and i am the tearing of the skin
and i am the violence of a murder
and when i am wake sometimes
i am the hollowed out shell
a shell i've inhabited since i was young
and never left

and anyone who may love me,
you should know that
i may inch up towards you
and i may swarm up against
you and in our bed
i may press against you
and steal healing from you
and it may not be fair and
it may not be fair but in my mind
i am howling at the door
left out in the cold with this grief

and i am inching closer trying to swarm and i am inching closer trying to
swarm to shield from harm
and i am schooling like silver fish and
i am a murmuration of starlings and i am swerving
in and out of sight and pulsating in the sky

and you should know and you should know--” Jonny

“i don’t know.

i know the pain. i know you attach
your pain onto me. but it’s not my fault.
i’m dead.

you made me a myth.
made me an ‘angel,’
and you think i’ve seen
the kingdom of
heaven or whatever.

you come to me in the night with your
hands shaking,
your breathing rapid and shallow,
in the throws of an anxiety attack,
and you expect me to be able to heal you,
to be able to answer for my soul leaving
like i chose this for myself.

i was a kid when i died.
i was having my
first awkward kisses,
i was skateboarding around town,
smoking weed out of an apple.
my best self never grew up.

who do you think i am?
have you forgotten who i was
when i died?

i have my own questions.

*how deep is the soul? how rooted in the body?
does the soul decay, become less? can it gain, become more?
will it travel? can my soul find yours through the static terror of each
day?
will it travel with us as we fade into sickness?
will the soul wrap around us?*

*sink us like a chain tied to an ankle,
or lift us like wings sprouting from the spirit?" -Josh*

“five young pallbearers, red-eyed and sniffing,
trying to stifle tears, shoulder to shoulder,
crammed in a limo following behind the hearse.

the interstate leading over the river,
a gentle dusted of mid morning snow;
the crawling motorcade buffered by cops
with flashing blue lights.

you are dead (*in the coffin, burned flesh*)
your mom and dad have a coffin, too
(*Uncle Chris, Aunt Carol, and he even killed the dog--*)

looking out over the bridge,
into the Fore River, freezing February,
Casco Bay placid,
blue ocean
lapping where the river
flattened out and met it
in the front seat of the
hearse
i want to take a nap
and meet you again, in a dream. but napping
seems impossible

the limo driver makes some joke
and we answer with a tired laugh.
i haven't laughed in days, maybe weeks—
all emotions seem
forced, squeezing some reaction,
perfunctory and automated.

it all is, in a way.
the only way to survive is to engage autopilot.
I fully hand myself

over to the ebb and flow.

ebb, meaning a sadness,
something like a tide,
a riptide, powerful,
insurmountable.

i scrape along with it,
bloated and drowning,
too tired to fight,
dragged along the bottom,
washing up again later on some shore,
wondering where i am.

time moves relentlessly,
and in the space between seconds
i feel
like i am surfacing,
swimming up through the dark water,
and gasping to life in some unknown place.

squeezed next to one of Josh's friends—Luke, i think—
i notice the sleeves of my tuxedo jacket are too short,
my jacket is too tight.
i've gained weight.
the attendant at the tux
fitting said that

I need to stop eating so many cheeseburgers.

i cross my arms to give him space.
the shoulders of the jacket threaten to rip out,
but reluctantly hold together.

the heated leather seats make my ass sweaty.

my legs are sore, knees scrunched up against
the glove box .

i'm shivering. i have to piss.

i wonder how much longer we have to drive,
and at once, I remember
what is waiting for us
when we arrive in South Portland
(*a dead best friend, a fucking hearse and a casket with his burned bod-*),
and, at once,
i want the ride to last forever. I close my eyes.

we drive
slowly over the roads
tinged pale gray with salt and ice,
a work truck ahead, flashing yellow,
treating the roads with sand,
sniffing again, all of us, trying to be silent.

and we are silent.
mind wandered from the habitual jabbing—
(*oh my fucking god you're dead*)
—to feeling the sting of my eyes,
i wonder how red they are,
if my eyes are as red as the rest.

i didn't want to cry when others were not crying,
or cry too much, or cry too little.
even in the throes of grief,
teenagers are still self conscious.

at one point or another during this,
we had all cried pretty hard,
sometimes together, sometimes alone,
sometimes embarrassed,

always pulled out

by the fucking riptide.

and there, on that late Feb.
mid morning,
the sad caravan meandering towards the cemetery,
the numbness set in like a
deep bone splitting cold.” --Jonny

“when i died it was february vacation.

i woke up.

the cul-de-sac circle
was coated in snow
and i saw the
flakes gently
swept up by the piercing wind
the absolute blue of the morning
burning a cold
fire in the sky.

i rolled out of bed

and mom and dad
were at the shop down
on the main tourist drag
and even though
the town was empty, hollowed
out at the end of the summer,
tourists gone, leaving the townies

and when the police chief spoke at the smoldering,
charred husk of my house

the next morning
to a rabble of reporters with tv cameras
he said

“the family was not on our radar at all
they owned a business,
were well liked in the community”

amazing how so much can
change from morning to morning,
life slides into
the narrow boundaries of death,
and at 8:45 a.m., I am hovering at the edge of
living,
and i don't know
that i am going to die

i don't have much to do today;
mom and dad are at work
i let spike, my dog, a puggle,
out of his kennel, and he yawns,

and zooms towards the front door;
i throw on some pants, and a jacket,
and i put a leash on spike to take him outside

and i can't even comprehend
that spike dies
too

and i can't even imagine, can't even
begin to imagine
a world that moves past my

life,
that time could keep flowing

without me.”

-Josh

“when i sat down to write this book, Josh
i thought i’d try to imagine your life
and the years that were stolen from you;
i thought i would imagine you as a 29 year old
i thought i could predict what job you’d have,
who you would love,
what kind of jokes you could make,
what kind of video games you would play

but i

jesus

His

Cr t

I DON’T EVEN

REMEMBER WHAT

YOU

SOUND

LIKE

oh my god;

I DON'T EVEN
REMEMBER WHAT YOU SOUND LIKE.

-jonny

“i meet you in a dream.

it is a place beyond time, beyond death.

before you ask, yes, i am dead. you have
lived in a world without me for 15 years.

15 years of looking behind,
15 years of searching for me in the silence,
15 years of expecting violence to leak out into each day;
15 years of looking for knives
when you should
be looking for life.

half your life has been tethered to the knowledge
that life could end in a flash
that no one is ever safe from some terrible
end, from dying alone, scared, in pain,
bleeding out on the carpet.

half your life has been chained
to that february night,
chained to the daze of grief, chained to a brother

a brother lost

and my death has given you something to look for,
something to latch on you
someone to mythologize
someone to blame
for the way
you are.

you know me dead longer than you knew me alive.

but let us return
to that summer night
late, watching jackass
the one
where he swallows the goldfish

let us return to you dragging me by the ankles
into the lake

and that fourth of july
with the sky exploding
above us
and that fourth of july
sitting, watching
and that fourth of july
unburdened

and in this dream,
i come to you
with bolt cutters.

UNHINGE, RISE UP
NO TETHERS,
NO CHAINS,

NO KEEPING.

RISE UP, NO MORE
SAD AND DISTANT,
NO MORE RAISING
THE DEAD
EVERY MORNING

UNHINGE AND RISE UP, BROTHER.

MEET ME IN THIS FIRE.

